Coronado Dentist Fixes Lives As Well As Smiles
By Vicki Raun

This article first appeared in the December 22, 2005, issue of the Coronado Eagle & Journal.

It's not just smiles, but lives, that Dr. Suzanne Popp fixes in her Coronado dental office.

Popp donates her services to some of the 11,000 victims of torture now living in San Diego County. She learned of the needs of torture victims when representatives from Survivors of Torture, International made a visit to the Coronado Rotary Club.

Rotarians were being asked to share their homes with the torture survivors, but Popp wasn't sure her young, lively family was the best fit. She began to think about what she could do to help. "I thought, 'What if they need dental work?'" she said.

Popp had been listed for years as being willing to help battered spouses through the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry's "Give Back a Smile" program, but had never been called.

Her offer was quickly accepted by (Continued on page 3)

Director's Reflections
Kathi Anderson, Executive Director

Thank you for supporting our special event, Celebration of Hope and Healing, which marked our 9th birthday in February. Indeed, the event was both special and a celebration. The play, "I Have Before Me a Remarkable Document Given to Me by a Lady from Rwanda," was exquisitely performed and directed by the local 6@Penn Theater. The play’s story was that of healing and hope, not unlike the real life stories of our clients. Following the play our guests enjoyed a panel discussion and our signature reception of cabernet and chocolate.

Among those who attended the event were several faculty members from Point Loma Nazarene University. Because they were so impressed and moved by the play, they expressed their hope that it would also be performed on their college campus. Their hope became a (Continued on page 3)
THE SURVIVOR

Words from the Chairperson
Jeanette Barrack, PTR

At a recent board meeting, the board members discussed acknowledging and celebrating our successes. In these challenging times, it is especially encouraging when hard work pays off and it appears that our mission is becoming better understood by the community. I’d like to share with all of you one of our successes. Recently we received a grant for $24,230 from Grossmont Healthcare District (GHD), a public agency serving East County residents. In addition to the many other things that GHD does, it provides grants and sponsorships to help fund nonprofit health-related organizations.

SURVIVORS started its relationship with GHD in 2003 when its board granted us $8,740. Each year, as they have gotten to know us and understood our mission more fully, the amount has increased. In 2004, we received $9,000 and in 2005, $14,000. The grants are specifically for the medical, dental and psychological needs of our clients in East County, where 30 percent of the population we serve lives. Three of our board members live in East County, as well as our executive director. As an East County taxpayer, I am pleased to see the money going to a worthy cause.

Each time we receive financial support, be it from a public agency or an individual donor, it encourages our staff and volunteers, who work so hard, to continue this great work. It also tells all of us that slowly but surely our mission is being understood, and it tells our clients that they are being supported and welcomed into our community. Thank you for your continued support.

Congresswoman Davis States Her Support for Torture Victims Relief Reauthorization Act

SURVIVORS applauds Rep. Susan A. Davis (D-CA) for supporting the reauthorization of the TVRA and for continuing to recognize the value of our organization. These are excerpts from her written remarks that were added to the Congressional Record in December. Visit SURVIVORS' web site at www.notorture.org to read her complete statement.

Congresswoman Susan A. Davis
In Support of H.R. 2017, the Torture Victims Relief Reauthorization Act, Dec. 6, 2005

Mr. Speaker, as the House stands poised to consider and pass H.R. 2017, the Torture Victims Relief Reauthorization Act of 2005 (TVRA), I want to express my strong support for this legislation. I am proud to be a cosponsor of H.R. 2017. I want to take this opportunity to recognize the efforts of Survivors of Torture, International (SURVIVORS) in my district of San Diego, California. SURVIVORS is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to caring for survivors of politically-driven torture and their families who live in San Diego County.

Mr. Speaker, SURVIVORS works with refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants who are survivors of torture. By working with this large population in San Diego County, SURVIVORS is strengthening the nation: many of its clients move to other communities in the United States after receiving the care and services necessary to successfully build a new life here. As SURVIVORS continues to work in the community, it receives an increasing number of referrals and requests for services each year. There is also a need to continue making services even more comprehensive.

The professional background of SURVIVORS' clients includes: business, religious, government, and farm leaders; university students and educators; journalists; physicians and nurses. They are talented, trained, productive people who feel destroyed. Torturers today are able to create conditions which effectively break down the victim's personality, identity, and his/her ability to live a full life later. At SURVIVORS and groups like it across the nation, these individuals find help to begin reclaiming their lives.
Director's Reflections
Kathi Anderson, Executive Director

(Continued from page 1)

reality. On April 5, their college community was able to avail itself of not only a moving play but also a powerful message. It, too, was a successful fundraiser for Survivors of Torture, International.

Thank you to everyone who made both events so memorable. Again and again, your support gives a clear message to our clients that there is an increasingly larger community of individuals and institutions who wish to contribute to their healing and who believe in the resiliency of their human spirit. Thank you on behalf of our clients as well as our board of directors, staff and contractors who work to support them in their recovery from torture. We hope to see you at our special event next year which will mark the 10th birthday of Survivors of Torture, International.

Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP
Represents SURVIVORS
In Sacramento

In March, SURVIVORS began a partnership with one of the nation's premier law and consulting firms, Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP agreed to represent SURVIVORS in attempting to obtain financial support for client services from the State of California.

SURVIVORS will also work with Manatt to craft messages for education and advocacy campaigns. The firm hopes to initiate or support a range of activities to increase the general public’s awareness about SURVIVORS and the needs of torture survivors living in California. In Sacramento, Manatt will use its established government connections to introduce SURVIVORS to key legislators, government officers, commissions and staffs.

Manatt partners, Thomas McMorow and Paul Gangsei, and legislative advocates, Michael Martinez and McKay Tanner, will all be involved with this project. All services will be provided at no cost to SURVIVORS.

McKay Tanner said she is looking forward to the partnership and hopes that the activities will have long-lasting effects. "Our strategy for Survivors of Torture, International is far-reaching and multi-faceted," said Tanner. "We will be able to help in the effort to see a deserving population of our society get the help and aid they desperately need and deserve."

Receive The Survivor in Digital Format

SURVIVORS sends e-mail notices about important events, and we hope to launch an e-newsletter soon. Please send your name and e-mail address to Anu at avakateswaran@notorture.org if you would like to subscribe. Your e-mail address will be used for this purpose alone and will not be given to anyone else.

+++ JUNE +++
Torture Awareness Month

June 26th is the U.N. International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. It's a day for the international community to remember the suffering and courage of torture survivors and to express concern about the continued use of torture in more than 100 countries.

The date is significant because the United Nations first convened the Convention Against Torture on June 26, 1987. More than 100 nations ratified this convention thereby agreeing to a universal definition of torture and accepting obligations to prevent acts of torture, prosecute those responsible, and ensure proper rehabilitation for torture victims.

In past years, SURVIVORS has commemorated June 26th by hosting speakers, musicians, art exhibits and other activities. This year on June 26th, we will also continue to support other organizations who are honoring June 26th and to endorse the newly designated Torture Awareness Month.

The Torture Abolition and Survivor Support Coalition International (TASSC) based in Washington, D.C., gave June this distinction to say loud and clear, "No torture, in any nation, under any circumstances." TASSC is planning a variety of activities in June. Because of the rise of political debate about justification and legalization of torture, TASSC seeks to create a community of individuals and organizations who have zero tolerance for torture worldwide.

To learn more about June 26th and Torture Awareness Month, please visit SURVIVORS' web site at www.notorture.org or the TASSC web site at www.tassc.org.
One Befriender's Journey

Befrienders are volunteers who provide social support to SURVIVORS' clients. The nature of the friend relationship depends on the interests of both the client and the volunteer. It may include meeting for conversation, sharing a meal, taking a walk, or attending a free local event. It may also include helping the client figure out how to meet basic needs, connect with community resources, or learn to use the bus system. The goals are: 1) to help build clients' self-esteem and empower them to live independently in their new communities and 2) to build awareness about survivors and give community members an opportunity to help address their needs. We ask Befrienders to make a commitment of six to eight hours per month for six months.

This is an abridged version of Michael O'Donnell's story about being a Befriender. To read more about Michael's experience, visit SURVIVORS' website at www.notorture.org. To learn how to become a Befriender to one of our clients, call Kelly at (619) 278-2411 or e-mail her at kreed@notorture.org.

I can recall the biggest challenges I faced as a young man: not having a pair of Adidas basketball shoes, not having a Peter Maxx psychedelic folder to hold the few school assignments I actually completed, not having the proper haircut, and having too much acne. At no point did my list include not having a safe place for my children to sleep, not having enough food, nor having constant fear in my heart that the next day could bring intense horror. These mysterious concepts didn't concern me and I preferred it that way. But soon came the realization that self-sacrifice was a crucial component to growth.

My volunteer assignment for SURVIVORS began with the best intentions: do something nice for someone less fortunate. Applaud yourself for being such a wonderful contributor to society. Become a Befriender. Simple. I can do this. Things fell beautifully into place. I was to be paired up with a man from Rwanda. We were introduced. We spoke, determining how we would function within the other's world. We came to an agreement.

Thomas is small of stature and slight of voice. He was pleasant and respectful. An intense stare behind dark eyes betrayed a stifled angst — an angst made all the more difficult with the language divide. He struggled to find the right words, and I could see it in his body language. As I listened to him describe his background and situation, I quickly discarded pre-conceptions. I did not find him needy or desperate. It seemed as if pride was the only thing keeping him together. Conversely, I think — I hope — he did not find me pretentious.

"English," I said. "I teach English. And some computer skills. Resumes. We can even go see a movie... or we can..."

"English?"

"That's right."

"That's good. I need more English. And you don't talk too fast. Everyone talks fast. At work... fast, fast, fast."

I laughed as he raised both hands and made quick hand gestures.

"You're from..."

"Rwanda. Land of a thousand hills."

"Why is it called that?"

"Because it has many hills."

"I see."

We agreed to begin our friendship the following Friday.

That night I went online and found Rwanda: a small landlocked country in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa bordered by Uganda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Tanzania. Its fertile and hilly terrain, which gives it the title "Land of a Thousand Hills" supports the densest population in Africa. It is best known to the outside world for the 1994 Rwandan genocide that resulted in the deaths of up to one million people. Before this, it was known mostly as the habitat of mountain gorillas.

Mountain gorillas. I didn't know that. A genocide that had claimed the lives of so many. I recalled that, but not many of the details. Then again I knew little about what was actually occurring on another continent. Yes, I had rented "Hotel Rwanda," but I had never considered the turmoil of an individual from another land.

But as we continued to meet and experience each other's temperament, personalities, thresholds, quirks, we learned more about one another. In his native Rwanda, Thomas had been a teacher like me — math, science, geography. He played soccer. He has five children and was deeply worried one day when they had all come down with a bad cough. I saw the pain in those dark eyes and the helplessness at his being thousands of miles away and not being able to administer care. Not being able to function as a father to his children. Perhaps he saw the pain in my eyes despite my best effort to mask it as well. He also must have detected that we are not so different — a realization that despite geographic and cultural variations, basic needs and wants are consistent.

The hug I give to my sick child is no different from the hug given by a Rwandan man to his.
Two Sides of Family Reunification for Survivors

Life is all about transitions. Even in Southern California subtle changes mark the transition to spring. The bare branches of jacaranda trees become heavy with purple flowers and new leaves.

Our clients often express that the waiting time between fleeing the dangers of their home countries and reunion with their children and spouses is like a long winter. In a new land, they feel as barren and gray as leafless trees. After the long winter of waiting, however, many people are able to blossom into family life again.

For example, Sam fled alone to the United States five years ago leaving his wife and five children behind in Iran. On that dark night, running from the third death threat in as many days, he never imagined that he would not see his family again until 2006. He ran towards safety hoping to reunite with his family in a very short time. However, the asylum process proved to be more complicated than he had thought. He lacked documentation to prove the death threats to the immigration judge, and September 11th brought suspension and long delays in every step of the governmental process. His case was continued again and again. On the rare occasions that Sam was able to afford to phone home, he was at a loss as to how to explain the delay to his children. His oldest son, 15, fell into a deep depression. Sam's wife bore the burden of parenting alone in a hostile environment where she was questioned by officials constantly. It was a stressful time and the family yearned to be reunited in the United States.

This year, when reunification was finally a possibility, the family rejoiced. Documents were processed. Flights were booked. Rooms were readied at a family friend's home with great anticipation. Then came the sudden realization of the price of raising a family in high-rent San Diego. The income Sam could earn as a minimum wage worker was not sufficient.

In addition to the sudden financial stress, this loving family had to deal with the shocking truth that they did not really know one another any more. Every family member had changed since they had last seen one another. Sam had been on his own in a shared apartment, eating and cleaning as a bachelor does. Mother had become a single parent who had to make all the decisions for her child without the traditional input of her husband. The children had grown and were no longer as easily obedient. The trauma of the death threats and constant harassment had somewhat healed for Sam. He had worked hard with his therapist at SURVIVORS and had overcome much of the pain.

For his family, however, the trauma is still very present. They had endured ongoing threats and the loss of their father in the home. Sam's wife and children need their own time to heal and rebuild. Seeing them in such pain retraumatizes Sam, and weighted down by guilt, he now doubts his own recovery.

We often forget that growing is painful. Trees bloom into beautiful colors without needing help. Renewal is not that easy for our clients, but with help it is possible. At SURVIVORS, we try to prepare our clients for both the joy and the stress of reunion. We are ready to help them meet the challenges of adjusting to reunification and to their new community in San Diego.

Coronado Dentist Fixes Lives ... Smiles

(Continued from page 1)

Survivors of Torture. Her first torture patient, a man from Africa, had been made to hold acid in his mouth. "Sixteen of his teeth were destroyed," Popp said. "He was left with just the gum with nerves sticking out. I can't imagine the pain." After an initial exam by Dr. David Irwin of Pacific Beach and work by Oral Surgeon Dr. Fred Hammond, Popp began reconstructive work on the man's mouth. She then designed and fit dentures for him. "He was so happy to be able to chew," she said.

Another patient had been hit so hard that his two front teeth had lodged in his nose. His bottom teeth were broken. Popp provided him with crowns. "It changed him so much, he smiles and can look for a job now," she said. "His self-esteem changed.

She's treated about eight torture victims. "They come from all over," she said. "The Middle East, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe." Many of the torture victims have been granted asylum as refugees by the United States, a special immigration status for people at danger in their home countries due to their race, religion, ethnic group or political views. "They've not come to the U.S. for a free ride," said Popp. "They're getting out of seriously dangerous situations."

Popp, Irwin and Hammond are the only area dentists involved with Survivors of Torture Internationals San Diego office. Popp doesn't ask the torture survivors much about their backgrounds. "They prefer not to dwell on it, and I've stopped asking. It's not something I need to know. I don't know the politics or who tortured them," she said.

Popp said she doesn't think the Survivors of Torture group is well known to other dentists. "I don't think they know about it, and I don't know how easy it is to help the torture victims," she said. "The patients are pleasant, clean, polite, just very nice people."
Thank You to All of Our Community Supporters
January 1 through March 31, 2006

We are grateful to the following individuals and companies for your generous support. Your donations of time and in-kind goods and services help SURVIVORS' programs run smoothly.

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Thank you!!!

We apologize for any errors or omissions and extend our gratitude for support that may not have been recognized.
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January 1, 2006 - March 31, 2006

Healing broken hearts and restoring the spirits of torture survivors in San Diego County is accomplished with the help of our financial supporters. With you, the survivors are able to rebuild their lives. We are grateful. We apologize for any errors or omissions, and extend our gratitude to donors who may not have been recognized.

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SURVIVORS' Audit  
Documents Careful Spending

Here at SURVIVORS, we spend your dollars wisely. Our latest audit shows that we spent less than 10% of our total income on administrative costs in fiscal year 2005.

In a letter to Executive Director Kathi Anderson, the Sonnenberg & Company auditors also commended SURVIVORS for our thorough financial records. They did not issue any recommendations for improvement.

"We wish to commend you and your staff for the records which were in excellent condition, and for the cooperation provided to us," they wrote.

If you would like a copy of our audit, please contact our finance coordinator, Alexey Kirillov, at (619) 278-2406 or akirillov@notorture.org.

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SURVIVORS of Torture . . .

was incorporated in February 1997 in response to a need in our community to bring assistance to that segment of the population which struggles with the wounds of politically motivated torture.

Since then, SURVIVORS has engaged a caring network of professionals — board members, attorneys, interpreters, therapists, physicians — and all of YOU in the community who give faithful support and encouragement in many ways.

We serve survivors who reside in the greater San Diego and Southern California area, but are prepared to assist the legitimate needs of all survivors of politically motivated torture.

For information about SURVIVORS, or to participate in our mission — please visit our website: www.notorture.org — or contact us by e-mail at: survivors@notorture.org.